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SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER LAVROV VISIT TO INDIA REAFFIRMS
TIES, SETS UP MEDVEDEV VISIT FOR DECEMBER

Classified By: A/PolCouns Pushpinder Dhillon for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary. During his October 20 visit to New Delhi,
Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov:

- brought a message that Russia's relations with India remain a priority for Moscow;
- announced Russia will assist India in building four additional nuclear reactors at the Kudankulam power project;
- told FM Mukherjee that Russia believed Iran was considering the possibility of dialogue over its nuclear program, so Moscow felt sanctions should not be used at this juncture;
- described India as "a strong candidate" for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council;
- signed a protocol agreement for continued exchanges between foreign ministries; and
- discussed preparations for President Medvedev's trip to India, scheduled for early December. End Summary.

Assurance of Continued Close Relations

¶2. (C) Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's October 20 visit to India was designed to bring assurances from Moscow that India-Russia relations, often under scrutiny in the past year by Indian media, remain a priority, according to Valery Khodzaev, Political Counselor at the Russian Embassy in New Delhi. FM Lavrov's visit comes amidst a flurry of official Russian visitors to Delhi in recent months, Khodzaev noted, ranging from technical cooperation experts to Defense Minister Serdyukov. These visits have all been seen as part of the preparatory process for President Medvedev's visit scheduled for early December, the "main political event of the year" in Indo-Russia relations, Khodzaev said. Medvedev's visit is his first to India as President, but is part of a regular chain of annual summits alternating between capitals.

¶3. (C) FM Lavrov's one working day in New Delhi centered around bilateral meetings with External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. According to Khodzaev, who sat in Lavrov's meetings, PM Singh reciprocated Moscow's message by assuring Lavrov that India intends to strengthen its strategic partnership with Russia. Both Singh and Mukherjee thanked Lavrov for Russia's support

as India worked with the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and domestically to gain civil nuclear cooperation with the international community.

A Call for a United Response to the Global Financial Crisis -----

14. (C) Lavrov told Mukherjee that Russia supported President Sarkozy's call (sic) for a meeting of the G-8 plus outreach partners (to include India) to discuss the global financial crisis, according to Khodzaev. Russia's view was that this crisis required joint action by all members of the international community to come up with a new financial architecture. Lavrov called the need for action a "collective responsibility."

Four New Nuclear Reactors -----

15. (C) Turning to more tangible issues, Khodzaev reported to Poloff that Lavrov offered India Russia's assistance on constructing four new nuclear reactors at the Kudankulam power project site in Tamil Nadu, in addition to the two reactors Russia is currently helping to build. Mukherjee observed that the two reactors under construction should be completed in 2010, but no specific dates were discussed for completion of the four new reactors, Khodzaev added. When pressed on terms of the agreement, Khodzaev replied that he was not aware of technical details, but that the agreement

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would be transparent and submitted to the IAEA by December.

A Belief Iran May Intend to "Consider the Possibility of Dialogue" -----

16. (C) In response to a question from Mukherjee, Lavrov said that Russia believed it was a positive sign that Iran had tried to clarify elements of the P5 Plus 1 package it had received, a sign that Moscow considers shows "the intention to consider the possibility of dialogue," Khodzaev stated. Because of these signals that Tehran may wish to engage in dialogue, Lavrov told Mukherjee that Russia spoke out against sanctions at this juncture, calling for the negotiations cited in UNSCR 1835. Khodzaev reported that Mukherjee had no substantive response or comment, merely expressing appreciation for hearing the Russian position.

A Strong Candidate for UNSC -----

17. (C) Following FM Mukherjee's comment that India expected Russia's support for its bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, Lavrov told Mukherjee that Russia's policy has not changed -- Russia "believes India is a strong candidate." However, Lavrov explained, Russia feels the UN General Assembly is divided over the modalities of selecting Security Council members, and until such time as a way forward is decided, Russia will not offer an explicit public endorsement of India's seat.

Protocol on Consultations -----

18. (C) The two sides also signed a Protocol on Consultations between the two Foreign Offices, to institutionalize exchanges between the ministries below the minister level. Khodzaev added this protocol didn't add any new mechanism, but had practical implications for Russia, as it was the document the Foreign Ministry needed in budget preparations to finance these exchanges with India.

Nothing on Regional or Defense Issues -----

¶9. (C) Khodzaev revealed that neither defense cooperation nor regional issues were discussed, despite what was said in the ministers' joint media interaction. He said the Russians were surprised India did not bring up Georgia, but assumed the Indians did not wish to offend their guest. He also said that time could have been a factor as discussion of other issues filled the agenda. Defense cooperation had been discussed just three weeks prior by Minister Serdyukov, Khodzaev stated, with all outstanding issues cleared, including cost overruns on the Gorshkov aircraft carrier purchase.

Medvedev in Early December

¶10. (C) While Khodzaev would not reveal specifics of deliverables being planned for President Medvedev's visit, he did say that in general the visit will emphasize the ongoing nature of Russia-India relations. This is "The Year of Russia" in India, and Medvedev's visit will bring the official closing ceremony to those celebrations. While media is reporting Medvedev will come to India December 3-5, Khodzaev said no dates had been finalized, although it should be sometime during the first week of December.

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